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C O N F I D E N T I A L MEXICO 003296

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [MX](#)
SUBJECT: ENGAGING THE NEW MEXICAN ADMINISTRATION ON
SECURITY AND COUNTER-TERRORISM

Classified By: AMBASSADOR ANTONIO O. GARZA, JR., REASONS; 1.4(B/D)

¶1. (C) Summary: This is the first in a series of six cables on transition issues in Mexico. We have an effective relationship with Mexico when it comes to counter-terrorism, particularly on special interest aliens (SIAs) and alien smuggling. The first transition challenge will be to make the new administration understand how that relationship works and why we must maintain it. The second challenge will be to get the new administration focused on a number of areas for improvement, including training efforts to increase Mexican capabilities. In the area of security cooperation with the Mexican military, we are poised for a significant step forward provided we can convince the incoming administration of the importance of taking that step. End summary.

¶2. (C) The terrorism threat from Mexico appears to be the potential transit of third country nationals rather than any indigenous terrorists. For that reason, our focus here is on detecting special interest aliens (SIAs), the alien smuggling organizations they might employ, and effectively employing systems used to detect air passengers of concern.

¶3. (C) The Fox Administration has established a good record of cooperation with us on CT issues, and we will want to encourage the incoming administration to continue that. The Center for National Security Investigations (CISEN) is a key agency for CT cooperation, but we also enjoy strong relationships with the National Migration Institute (INM). As in law enforcement cooperation, we need to make it clear that the status quo represents the foundation on which we should build. We cannot afford to have a new administration backslide on CT cooperation while it finds its feet. Although Mexicans still do not regard themselves as targets for terrorism (despite their proximity to a country that clearly is a target), there is a strong appreciation here for the fact that a terrorist attack on the U.S. launched via Mexico could have devastating consequences for the Mexican economy.

Information Sharing

¶4. (C) As noted, information sharing on CT issues under the Fox administration has been good, but there are specific improvements that could be made. This would improve the clarity of our picture of persons of interest who are moving into Mexico and help us better understand the alien smuggling networks used by these people.

¶5. (C) Engagement: Terrorism should be on the list for every encounter between senior U.S. officials and incoming Mexican counterparts during the transition (see septel for a list of suggested visits). Much was accomplished during the Fox administration thanks to the designation of a CISEN Director committed to cooperation with the U.S., sensitive to our concerns, and with sufficient clout within the administration to get things done. We should signal early and at the most senior levels our need for another such person. Although it will be a tough sell if a new party comes in, we also need to make a plea for minimal personnel disruption at the lower levels (say below the director general level).

¶6. (C) Activities:

-- We should encourage the GOM to share fingerprint and other biometric data with the FBI to be included in the Integrated Automated Fingerprint Identification System and other terrorism databases.

-- We should propose increased liaison with GOM law enforcement/intelligence agencies to obtain interview results and seized items (particularly documents, telephone numbers, etc.) from SIAs.

-- We should encourage exchange of information between INM, ICE, and CBP on operations that target alien smugglers (e.g., Operation Sonora and Plan Sentinel or Centinela).

-- We should signal our desire to increase cooperation on alien smuggling initiatives along Mexico's northern and southern borders.

-- We should seek access to INM's database (SIOM) of passenger entries into major airports in Mexico.

Improving Mexican Capabilities

¶7. (C) There are a variety of areas in which Mexican capabilities need improvement and where, using existing resources, we could provide a quick boost to Mexican efforts.

As always in such endeavors, we reap the double benefit of improved host nation capabilities and the stronger working level relationships that are built in training.

¶8. (C) Engagement: Mexicans understand an attack on the U.S. via Mexico would be catastrophic for Mexico. They are less aware of the danger of an attack in Mexico, but the fact is that Mexico offers a wide variety of tempting targets for a terrorist who might want to avoid the scrutiny of U.S. homeland security officials. Border towns, energy infrastructure, airlines, American businesses, and tourists all present themselves. We need to impress this fact upon the new administration as an introduction to our offer to help.

¶9. (C) Activities:

-- The USG shares the no-fly list with Mexico, but a response capability is lacking. Mexican authorities have approached us regarding the need to develop a standard joint response protocol. We should offer the GOM assistance in developing and implementing an interagency response for handling no-fly situations.

-- The GOM has been using the Advanced Passenger Information System (APIS) since 2004. However, the GOM should be encouraged to work to increase commercial carrier compliance.

-- We should encourage participation in the FBI's WMD initiative to give the GOM a comprehensive WMD response capability. This would include training on conducting threat assessments, handling or neutralizing WMD, and "train the trainer" courses.

-- We should encourage MANPADS surveys at Mexico's busiest and most vulnerable airports. Mexico has participated in MANPADS training and has agreed to conduct a joint Canada-U.S.-Mexico survey of Mexico City's Benito Juarez Airport or a border airport under the SPP.

-- USG agencies such as USCG and TSA should begin a dialogue with the new administration to establish baselines of existing training in the areas of facilities security and to prioritize training on infrastructure security.

-- We should offer training at Mexican ports of entry to improve the capabilities of front-line officials. This would include interview techniques, baggage search, impostor identification, fraudulent document detection, etc.

-- The FBI should reiterate to the new government its offer to increase the number of Mexican candidates sponsored for attendance at the FBI National Academy.

Military to Military Relations

¶10. (C) The Mexican military is key to many CT and law enforcement functions here. We cannot achieve our security goals with regard to Mexico without a strong mil-mil relationship with a capable Mexican military. The good news is that years of patient work by DOD and USNORTHCOM have opened the way to more meaningful interaction. We have a strong relationship with the Mexican Navy (SEMAR) and have reached the point where the scant resources we allocate to assistance have become the major limiting factor. More recently, the frost has thawed with the Mexican Army and Air Force (SEDENA) as well, and they too have begun to seek concrete engagement.

¶11. (C) Engagement: The Mexican military stands somewhat apart from the civilian agencies in the cabinet, with the

uniformed Secretaries of National Defense and the Navy reporting directly to the President. That said, if a Mexican President tells his military to develop closer ties with the U.S., they will do it. Conversely, the Mexican military needs that sort of "top cover" for its engagement with us. It is therefore critical that we make this an issue with the incoming administration, above all with the new president. We should bear in mind that the new president and his civilian advisors will arrive in office knowing very little about military affairs (few Mexican civilians do). We should make clear we are not talking about "subordinating" the Mexican military to USNORTHCOM or pushing Mexico into peacekeeping operations (although that would be a welcome step). We are simply talking about establishing a mature relationship similar to that we have with Canada that will allow us jointly to defeat common threats. And as with Canada, a strong mil-mil relationship in no way limits a government's freedom of action or binds it to the U.S. view on any international question. The bonus for Mexico is that a closer mil-mil relationship with the U.S. will increase Mexican capabilities across the board.

¶12. (C) Activities:

-- As noted in septel, an August SECDEF visit and the September independence day events to which we expect CJCS and USNORTHCOM will be invited are opportunities to discuss these issues.

-- We should continue to encourage reciprocal visits between senior SEDENA officers and senior USNORTHCOM officers.

-- We should encourage establishment of a direct communication link between SECDEF, SEDENA, and SEMAR.

-- We should offer SEDENA and SEMAR increased counter-terrorism and counter-drug training at the unit level.

-- We should build on the good will of Mexican assistance in

the wake of Hurricane Katrina and propose joint training on disaster relief scenarios.

-- Resources permitting, we should offer increased logistical support to both secretariats.

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GARZA